

Compressor Explodes As Test Is Run

By MARIAN PERRY and JACK A. HUGHES

A compressor being tested at the new Central Nitrogen, Inc., plant north of the city blew up Tuesday morning killing one worker, injuring nine others and causing considerable damage to the building where the equipment was housed.

The fatality victim died shortly after reaching the hospital. Two other injured were admitted for treatment and the remainder were examined and released.

The explosion occurred in the compressor building of the ammonia plant of the \$20 million chemical complex which is nearing completion on North U. S. 41.

A spokesman for Chemical and Industrial Corp., which has major construction contracts for the plant, said engineers and workmen were testing the multi-stage industrial compressor, "running the compression pressure up to minimum test standards." An observer indicated the equipment may have been at 3,000 pressure when it blew out although it has a maximum rating of 6,000 pounds.

The dead man and two hospitalized victims were reported to have been standing a few feet from the center of the explosion.

One of the workmen treated and released for minor injuries

said John Sasso, an engineer, was "blown right through the floor." Sasso died at the hospital within five minutes after his arrival.

Officials declined to try to pinpoint the cause of the blast. Apparently a component of the compressor identified as a fourth-stage discharge snubber was the actual location. Two metal plugs about two inches in diameter were blown out and ripped through a steel wall of the building leaving a three-inch hole.

Observers said several hundred workmen were in the general area of the compressor building at the time but relatively few were in the close vicinity.

Metal Scattered.

Fragments of metal littered the ground around the building, a steel structure whose metal grating floor is 10 feet above the ground level.

No estimate of the extent of damage was given by insurance adjusters on the scene or by company officials. Alfred Bien, Chemico project engineer, met newsmen at the gate and Harry Bryant, engineer, escorted them to the accident site and explained the equipment. However, he did not discuss the probable cause. One

Continued On Page 2, Col. 2.

employee mentioned the possibility of "a faulty piece of equipment" but added "nobody knows yet."

The entire unit will be torn down to determine the cause, it was understood.

No Delay Expected.

Ernest C. Davis, plant manager of Central Nitrogen, said he did not expect any delay in dedication of the new facility set for October nor in the start of full production in November.

"But at this point," he said, "no one knows. The equipment will have to be checked out completely and the findings from that might result in some delay."

One of the first on the scene of the explosion was Mrs. Gladys Conder, Chemico company nurse, who administered first aid. The three seriously hurt victims were taken to Union Hospital in Thomas and Callahan ambulances and the seven with possible injuries were driven in company cars. All were Chemico employees except three who are employed by Potter Electric Company here.

First report of the blast came about 9 o'clock when a company watchman alerted law enforcement authorities. The explosion reportedly was felt by residents in the Otter Creek area. One worker, Willis Williams, 2221 South Seventh street, said it was so loud it probably was heard for several miles.

The entire area was immediately closed off to evacuate all personnel and to exclude curious spectators.

At first report there was to be no admittance for 24 hours but a CNI official revised the order and gates were opened at 11 o'clock for newsmen.

The area remains closed pending further investigation.

The Central Nitrogen plant which has been on a 208-acre tract in Otter Creek Township under construction for one year has been making test runs in recent weeks and is scheduled to go into production within a month. At peak production the plant will employ a force of 200 to 250 persons. Its facilities include a 350-ton per day ammonia plant, a 350-ton per day nitric acid plant, a 400-ton per day nitrate plant and a 8,000-ton per day nitrogen solutions plant.

CNI is co-operatively owned by four Farm Bureau corporations in Indiana, Illinois and Ohio and will distribute its products in the three-state area. It is the fifth such nitrogen plant to be built in the U. S. and the first in the Midwest.

Officers from the Terre Haute Police Department, Indiana State Police and Vigo County Sheriff's office were on the scene to assist plant protection personnel.

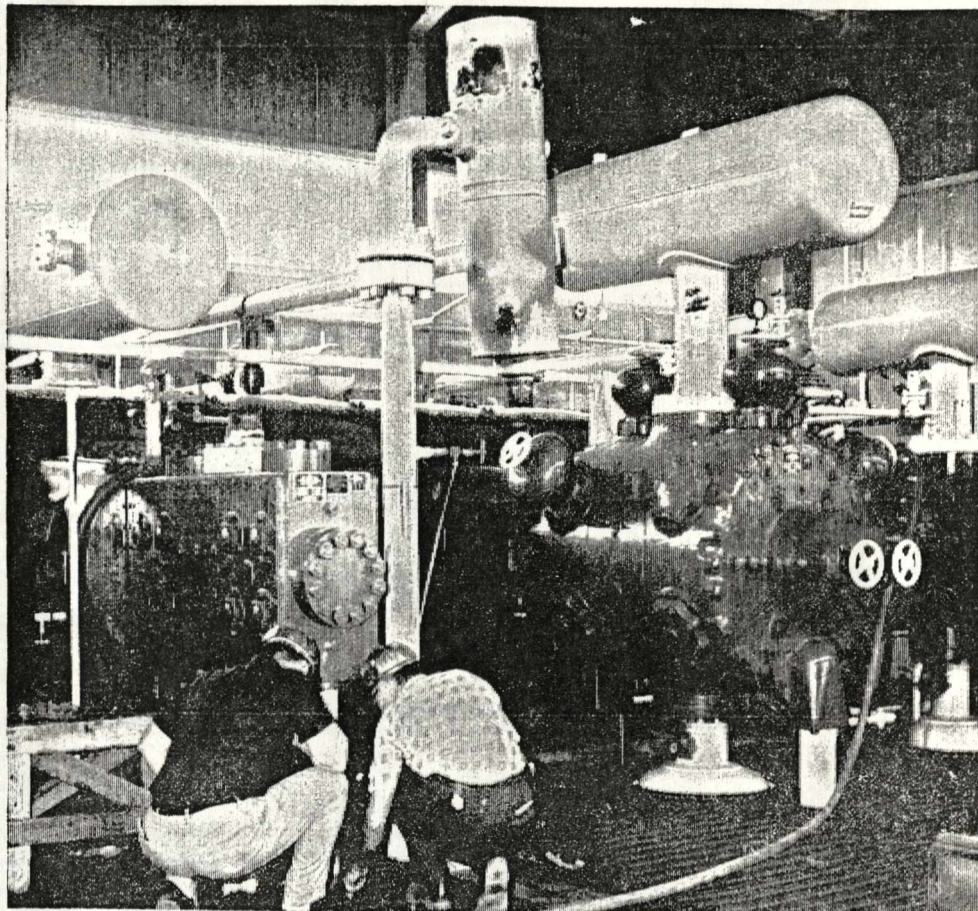
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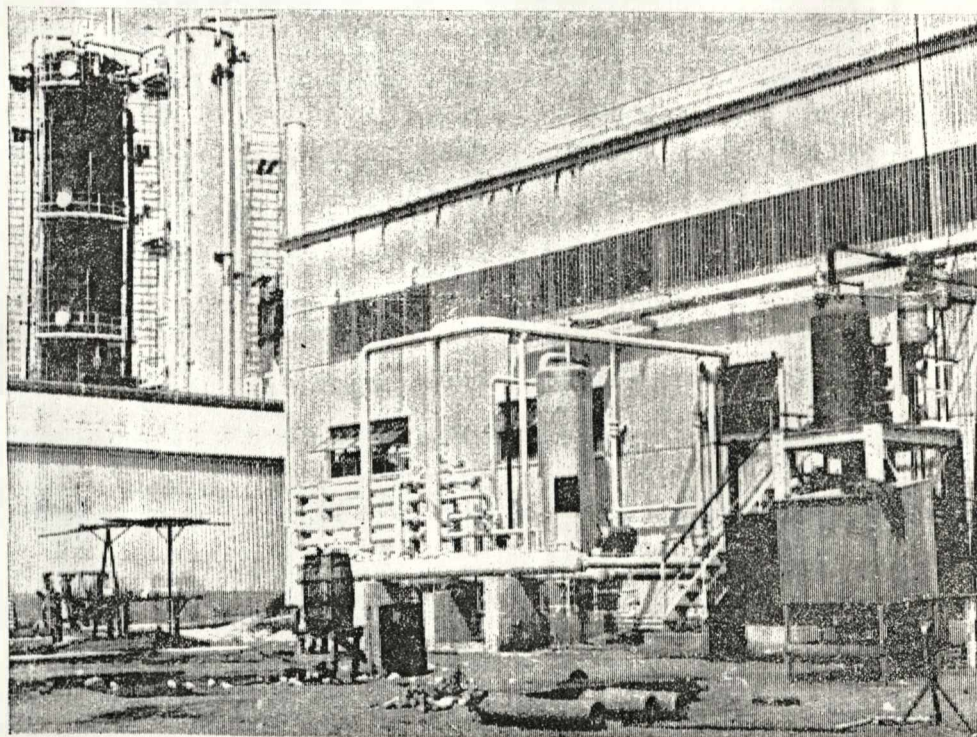
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Central Nitrogen Plant Explosion

sep - 1963



THE EXPLOSION OCCURRED in the fourth stage discharge "snubber" of this huge multi-stage industrial stationary compressor, spinning the "snubber" unit around on its supporting pipe and apparently disintegrating a quantity of metal piping. A solid metal plug about two inches in diameter was blown through the steel wall of the building and considerable damage was to some metal work below the steel floor grating.



CENTRAL NITROGEN'S COMPRESSOR BUILDING of the Ammonia Plant, a view of the south side of the structure, in which one man lost his life and nine workers were injured when a compressor component exploded during testing operations. Photos by Martin.

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Sep 1963

Casualty List

9/17/63

T.H. TRIB

The list of dead and injured in an explosion at the Central Nitrogen, Inc., plant north of Terre Haute on U. S. Highway 41 Tuesday morning included:

DEAD

JOHN SASSO, 55, 1148 North Eighth street, Clinton.

INJURED

KENNETH PECK, 49, RR 1, Clinton.

LUKE MARTIN, 42, RR 3, Clinton.

KENNETH ERNHART, 54, 736 Blackman street, Clinton.

CHARLES HUTCHINGS, 54, Cayuga.

GARY JONES, 28, RR 1, Vincennes.

ROBERT STULTZ, 58, 146 Whitcomb street, Clinton.

JOHN THOMAS, 65, Dana.

HAROLD NICKLESS, 40, RR 1, Terre Haute.

FRANK McNABB, 49, RR 2, Robinson, Ill.

Two of the above victims of the blast, Peck and Martin, were admitted to Union Hospital and the others were treated and released.

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Nine Are Injured In Explosion at Central Nitrogen

BY KENT HARRIS

One man was fatally injured and nine others hurt, two seriously, in a blast Tuesday morning which rocked the compressor building of the new Central Nitrogen Plant under construction north of North Terre Haute.

Fatally injured was John Sasso, 55 years old, 1148 North Eighth Street, Clinton, pipefitter foreman for the Chemical Construction Corporation, a general contractor on the new fertilizer plant north on U. S. 41.

MOST SERIOUSLY injured of the nine men hurt in the explosion of the huge 5,000 horsepower compressor were Kenneth Leroy Peck, 49 years old, R. R. 1, Clinton, and Robert Luke Martin, 42, R. R. 3, Clinton.

Union Hospital officials Tuesday night said Peck and Martin were listed in "fair" condition and still suffering from shock. The hospital also said Peck suffered the loss of an eye in the blast.

Four other "Chemico" employees and three Potter Electric Company workmen were rushed to the north side hospital where they were given treatment for minor injuries and were later released.

LESS SERIOUSLY injured were Harold Nickless, 40, R. R. 1; Kenneth Ernhart, 54, 736 Blackman Street, Clinton; Robert Stultz, 58, 146 Whitcomb Street, Clinton; John Thomas, 65, Dana; Charles Hutchings, 54, Cayuga; Frank McNabb, 49, R. R. 2, Robinson, Ill., and Gary Jones, 28, R. R. 1, Vincennes.

Harry Bryant, a field engineer for the contracting company said Sasso, Peck and Martin were standing next to the compressor when a device described by the engineer as a "discharge snubber" failed in the fourth stage of the five-stage compressing process. Cause of the explosion which ripped through the welded junction of the huge compressor and the "discharge snubber" bottle is unknown.

A discharge snubber is an auxiliary unit designed to handle compression overflow.

The three men were less than four feet from the explosion area. Workers in an area below the site of the explosion were knocked as far as 25 feet from their work stations.

IMPACT OF the blast hurled pieces of metal through the corrugated siding of the structural steel building at points 75 feet from the discharge snubber.

The explosion knocked two pillars from their foundations, and jarred a number of large steel pipes from their mountings in an area below the blast.

"Chemico" officials said the compressor was one of two of its type in the building, and had been undergoing a test for the last two weeks. Previous reports of the amount of pressure on the compressor and tank were denied. However, a spokesman said the system was running far below its highest pressure capacity at the time of the blast. It was speculated that the blast was of the air-oil type.

"CHEMICO" OFFICIALS said the compressor, one of the largest in the world, will be completely dismantled and rebuilt. During dismantling stages, parts will be inspected to determine the cause of the explosion.

First report of the blast came at 9 o'clock when a plant watchman alerted state police and the sheriff's office. Time of Sasso's death was 9:33 o'clock, about five minutes after his admission to the hospital.

Mrs. Gladys Conder, "Chemico" nurse, was one of the first on the scene. She administered first aid to the injured workers.

The three most seriously hurt men were taken to the hospital in Thomas and Callahan ambulances.

ERNEST C. DAVIS, resident manager of the \$20 million Central Nitrogen plant Tuesday night said the plant was scheduled to begin operations in October. He pointed out that the "Chemico" firm was building sections of the plant for Central Nitrogen.

He said that Central Nitrogen will not be involved in the operation of the plant until its completion.

Davis said Central Nitrogen employees are in a training program.

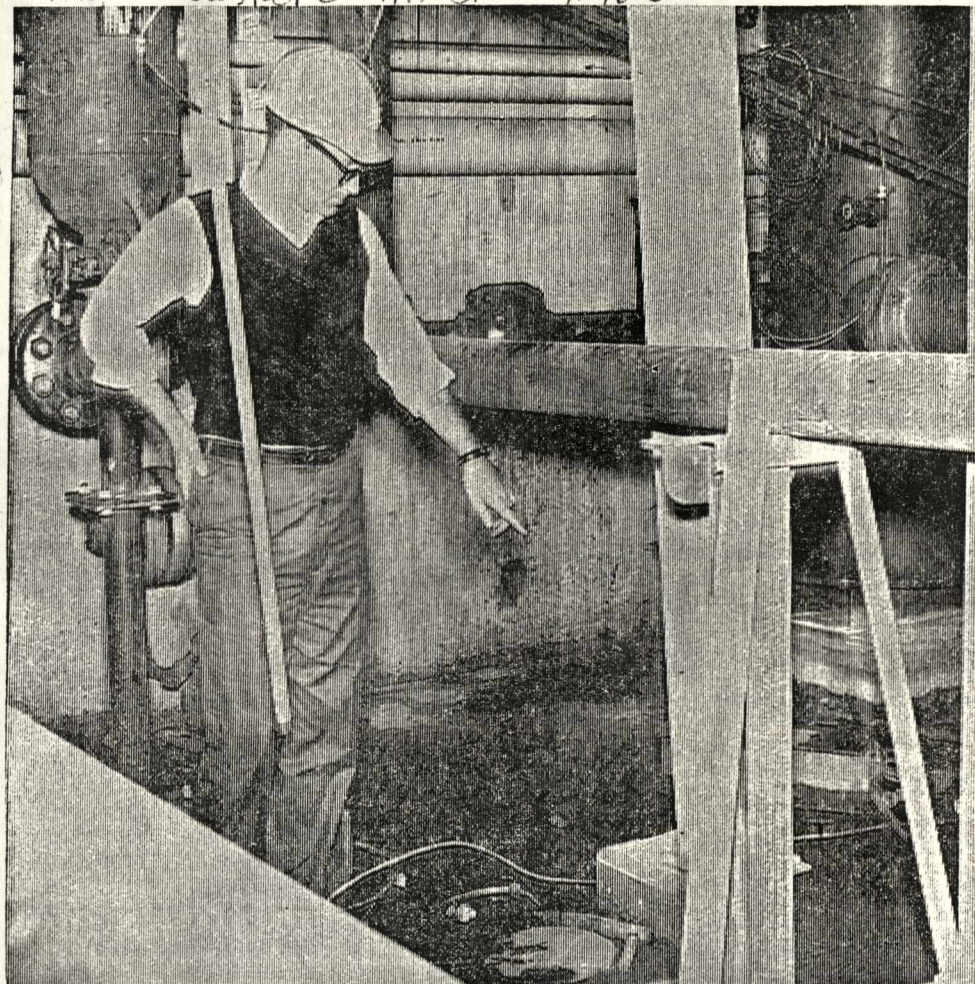
The "Chemico" office said Sasso, a pipefitter and member of Terre Haute Local No. 157, Plumbers and Steamfitters Union, had been employed here since March 22.

THE BODY was taken to the Karanovich Funeral Home in Clinton where services will be conducted at 10 o'clock Friday morning. The Rev. Father Jerome Bennett will officiate and burial will be in Walnut Grove Cemetery, Clinton. Friends may call after 6 o'clock Wednesday evening.

Born in Clinton, Sasso was a veteran of World War II, and a member of the Rosedale American Legion Post. Surviving are the widow, Esther; two sons, John Sasso, at home, and Louis Gene Sasso of Seaside, Cal.; a daughter, Miss Theresa Marie Sasso, at home; two brothers, Charles Sasso of Gary, and Tilio Sasso of Provo, Utah; two sisters, Mrs. Rena Nardi and Mrs. Norma Farina, both of Clinton, and three grandchildren.

Plant Blast Kills Worker

T.H. DISASTERS - T.H. Star - 9/18/63



BLAST-ROCKED BUILDING—Harry Bryant, field engineer for the Chemical Construction Corporation, points to a support column knocked off its foundation by an explosion which ripped through the compressor building of the Central Nitrogen, Inc., plant north of North Terre Haute Friday morning. The support post is located directly beneath the site of the explosion, separated only by a metal grated floor. Bryant indicates large bolts sheared from post by force of blast.

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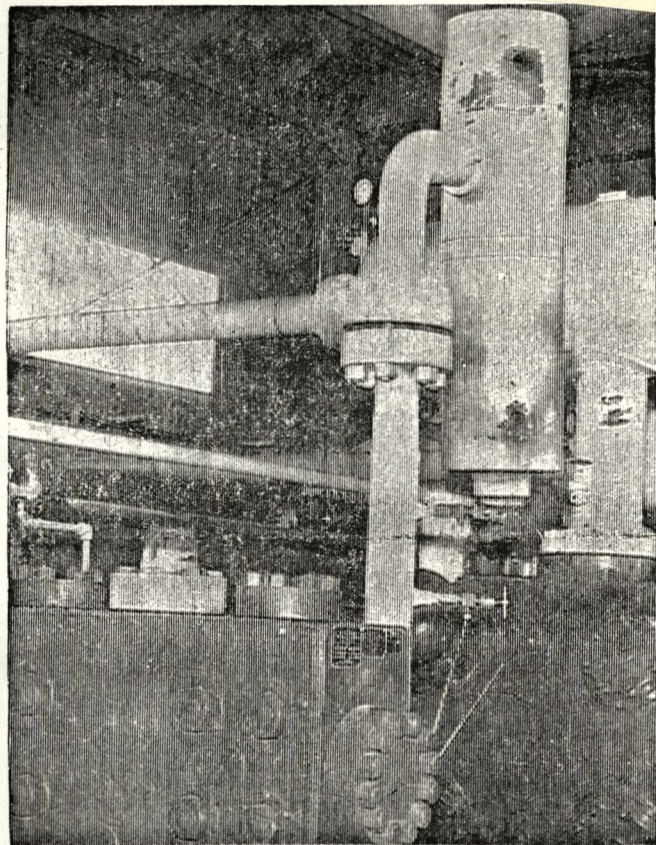
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Central Nitrogen & Fertilizer 9-63

Central Nitrogen Explosion 9-63



Nitrogen

(Photos by Ken Anderson)

POINT OF EXPLOSION—This discharge snubber, upper right, an auxiliary unit designed to handle compression overflow on a 5,000-horsepower compressor at the new Central Nitrogen plant north of North Terre Haute, exploded Tuesday morning, fatally injuring a foreman and hurting nine other workers. Force of the blast ripped the discharge bottle from its junction at the compressor, and twisted the snubber six-inch pipe around 90 degrees to the right. Two two-inch steel plugs were hurled through the corrugated steel wall nearly 75 feet away, leaving two three-inch holes in the walls.

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Central Nitrogen Explosion 9-63



^{9/8/63}
BLAST VICTIM—John Sasso, 55 years old, of 1148 North Eighth Street, Clinton, was fatally injured in an explosion which jarred the compressor building at the Central Nitrogen plant north of North Terre Haute Tuesday morning. Sasso, pipefitter foreman for the Chemical Construction Corporation, died five minutes after his admission to Union Hospital shortly before 9:30 o'clock Tuesday morning. He had worked at the local plant since March 22. Nitrogen Plant

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